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AN ADDRESS

ON THE

NECESSITY, USES, AND ADVANTAGES OF AFFORDING TO THE
LABOURING CLASSES, THE MEANS OF ACQUIRING GENERAL,
SCIENTIFIC, MORAL, AND POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE;

DELIVERED AT THE

WHITEHAVEN MECHANICS' INSTITUTION,

ON

The 12th, and again on the 19th and 20th of June, 1832,

BY

GEORGE WHEATLEY.

"The Truth against the World."

OLD PROVERB.

S WHITEHAVEN:

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TO

JOSEPH HUME, ESQUIRE,

Member of Parliament for the County of Middlesex.

SIR,

Seeing what your principles have been; seeing what your conduct has been: your principles and conduct entitle you to the esteem of the people, enhanced as your title is, by the work forthcoming, under your auspices—the PEOPLE'S ENCYCLOPEDIA—based on the principle of universal knowledge for all men.

In inscribing to you this effort to promote the good of my fellow countrymen, permit me to bear testimony to the value of your services in the common cause: at the same time, I take the opportunity, of acknowledging the kindness and assistance of my brother members of the Whitehaven Mechanics' Institution, and of other friends, at whose request this address has been published.

With all sincerity,

Sir,

I am your obedient servant,

GEORGE WHEATLEY.

1st July, 1832.

ADDRESS.

BROTHER MEMBERS AND FRIENDS,

During his earthly pilgrimage—within the last few days, his spirit hath winged its way to immortality—JEREMY BENTHAM said, “If deception be not a man’s object, he cannot make known too early the end he is endeavouring to lead his hearers to.”

Myself a disciple of the Benthamite school of philosophy, I profit by the precept and the example of our revered master and friend.

It is proposed to teach the labouring classes general, scientific, moral, and political knowledge:—Shall they be taught? I say—yes.

Shall prohibition be put on their learning the whole, or any part, of any branch of human knowledge? I say—no.

In few words has been made known my object: hear what may be said in favour of its acceptance by others.

The examination of the subject will be conducted on the principle of, “try all things, hold fast that which is good.”

First, will be spoken of—Mechanics’ Institutions, locally and generally, their origin, objects, and causes of failure: similarly treated will be the tendency, faults, and causes of failure, of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge: then will be noticed, the state of education in general, especially as relates to the labouring classes: next will be spoken of, those things relating to rudimental schools, and especially to schools for grown up persons, namely, Mechanics’ Institutions, pointing out the principle on which they ought to be formed and conducted;—recommending the system of universal knowledge, in the formation of *Mechanics’ Libraries*;—the formation of *News Rooms*;—and of *Societies for the discussion of moral and political philosophy* by the labouring classes: in conclusion, replying to the arguments advanced against the labouring classes being taught moral, and political, as well as scientific knowledge.

Knowledge having been had of the Mechanics’ Institution established at Whitehaven, a detail of its transactions and affairs will be given as generally illustrative of the system.

The means of instruction for the labouring classes being so small, when institutions, having that end in view, fall into decay, or altogether fail, it is greatly to be regretted. Indeed, so great is the demand for popular instruction, and so scanty are the means of supply, whether looking back upon the past, or looking forward to the time to come, the drying up of any channel, however small, cannot but be deemed a serious evil. Seeing the great need there is of all kinds of information for the labouring classes, by the course of events now called upon to take a part in that which hitherto has been confined to the few—especially at such a period, in the light of a serious evil, is to be viewed, the decayed state of Mechanics’ Institutions.

Of the Whitehaven Mechanics' Institution which has largely partaken of the general decay, some account will be given, in order to a discovery of the root of the evil that has so injuriously affected it and others; and having found it out, to attempt the application of a cure.

The Whitehaven Mechanics' Institution was formed in 1825, at a period when a great effort was made to instruct the labouring classes. The Institution was set on foot by the labouring classes, aided by their wealthier neighbours. In money, nearly one hundred pounds were collected: considerable gifts of books made: a library was formed: and there were enrolled twenty-five life members, and one hundred and thirty-four annual members. Life members were admitted by a payment of two guineas. A yearly subscription of eight shillings constituted an annual member. Besides, by payment of four shillings yearly, young men of eighteen, and by payment of two shillings yearly, boys of fourteen were admitted to the benefits of the Institution, having the use of the library, and permission to attend classes and lectures. The subscriptions were payable yearly, half-yearly, or quarterly, according to convenience. But, life and annual members, alone, transacted the business of the Society.

Of the honorary officials nothing needs be said: they consisted of the usual numbers of such appendages, the lumber materials of all societies, generally proving themselves to be drawbacks on those projects, it has been mistakenly supposed, they are, that they ought at least, to promote.

Constituted in the way spoken of, with a large fund in hand, and with considerably more than a hundred yearly subscriptions, producing an income of between fifty and sixty pounds, there were fair, even sanguine prospects of success, which unfortunately has not been realized.

For want of success, various causes may be assigned. Jealousy, (well or ill founded), of interference by labourers, of non-labourers. Jealousy of labourers by each other. Too numerous an acting body, the committee at first consisting of no less than thirty-three members. Perhaps, that the expectations formed of the advantages to be derived from the Institution, were not found to answer. Last, not least, the depression of the times, which made the sparing of a trifle, in many cases, a hardship, in very many, an impossibility.

However it may have been, so it is, that the Whitehaven Institution has shown symptoms of that lethargy, the forerunner of dissolution; the yearly subscription, and those got with difficulty, amounting to little more than the unavoidable current expenses.

Latterly, indeed, the decline may be owing to, certainly it has been hastened by the indifference of the first promoters of the Institution, besides the operation of the causes indicated. A year or two ago, would have been to be taken into account of evil operating causes, the hostility of the enemies of the diffusion, of any, and of all kinds of knowledge. Some time ago, that hostility had been struck down: at the period spoken of, it was not, but now it is powerless: it has been mentioned, for the purpose of saying so: for treating it as a mockery: chiefly, for signalling one more glorious victory of that imperishable principle, "the truth against the world," over ignorance, bigotry, and selfishness.

The component parts of the Whitehaven Institution have been sketched; next, are to be considered the views of the Society, which were, to afford the means of reading scientific books connected with their trades, but which the labouring classes could not buy of themselves; to promote the delivery of lectures on mechanical and scientific subjects, not, however, to the exclusion of the fine arts; and especially for the forming and meeting together of classes for mutual instruction, in various branches of scientific knowledge.

In strictness, the funds were to be laid out in the buying of scientific books, though not to the exclusion of such works of general literature as were likely to convey useful knowledge—a vague term, and as since, and even then used, a grossly deceptive term.

In deference, (in an evil hour paid), to the prejudices of some, and to the hostility of others, of the class of honorary officials, to guard against the creeping in of things offensive to such persons, by special clauses were forbidden, the discussion of, and the admission of all books on, for the labouring classes, the damnable matters of politics, and the heretical doctrines of theology.

From the necessarily short statement given, at once will be seen, the innocent tendency of the objects of the Whitehaven Institution, and of all similar Institutions. Yet the formation of such Institutions provoked the hostility, may be truly said, the unprincipled hostility, of unfriends, carefully as such Institutions were preserved from the alarming contamination of politics and theology. Besides hostility, fettered in the way indicated, Mechanics' Institutions had to contend with difficulties inseparable from a system such as they were founded upon, a system having some good for its end, but not all the good that might be done—a prohibition, as much, if not more than hostility, causing ruin to all such Institutions.

Mechanics' Institutions, with details suited to circumstances, pretty much resembled each other.

An incident related in the life of Robert Burns, probably gave rise to the formation of Mechanics' Institutions. In the life of that gifted being, not an iota of which is without its interest, inasmuch as, from beginning to end, it is the history of genius triumphantly bursting asunder the bonds of adversity and poverty, and by its natural worth and vigour, rising, "o'er a' the ills o' life victorious," to immortality—at once an incentive, and an example to the lowest: in his life is given, an account of that which with singular propriety may be called—a travelling library—passing, as it did, from hand to hand, and formed by the contributions of a few neighbours, living within the limits of a parish. Mechanics' Institutions are societies after this fashion, though formed on an enlarged scale, regarding books, with additional facilities for conveying instruction, otherwise than by books, namely, by lectures, and by classes formed for mutual instruction.

One person, to whom falls no small share of consideration, takes credit to himself for having originated the system. William Birbeck is meant. Whether or no he is the originator, matters little, seeing, that is due to him the merit, and no mean merit it is, of having transplanted from a foreign land an useful plant, for use at home.

It would be unjust to pass over the claims of one other individual: for, though it may be that he adopted the notion, yet he gave

it that expansive turn—by his great and varied ability, it was so moulded, and to it he lent the sanction of his name, so as almost to make it his own: certainly, he insured its popular acceptance. Is meant, as he then was, Henry Brougham; as he now is, the Lord Brougham and Vaux; to whom, for impulse given, this tribute to the merits of the *man* is paid; but of whom, for not having given all the impulse that might be given, justice, and truth, demand arraignment at that bar, (whence comes unscathed no guilty man), the tribunal of public opinion.

No question, the intention of Mechanics' Institutions was good; but the system was bad, unwittingly, or designedly. By the promoters of Mechanics' Institutions a general view was concurred in—the spreading of what they put forth as useful knowledge; but knowledge confined to the sciences, relating to trades, and manufactures. The error in the system of Mechanics' Institutions was, in making a part to stand for the whole of useful knowledge.

In truth, useful knowledge means, whatever is called into use, in all the concerns and relations of life, morally, as well as physically; for instance, *physically*, regarding the means of learning how to live, and having relation to the business of life: *morally*, regarding the learning of the rules which guide men in their conduct towards their fellow men, and having relation to their duties as members of society—in its true sense, this is the meaning of useful knowledge.

Man, however he may debase himself, is, we all know, not merely a machine, but a thinking being as well. And surely, than to learn to live, man has a nobler part to learn; and if he hath more, as surely he hath, than to live, and die, like the beasts of the field—why was mere science, as applied to the arts of life, held out, and taught, as all the useful knowledge necessary? Stopping far short of the end, this was the grand error; and, in aiming at human perfection, let no one fancy vainly, he can overdo, for aim he ever so high, from his nature he must fall short of the mark.

Mischievous in the extreme, was the arguing of the question of the formation of Mechanics' Institutions, not as one of right of all men to universal knowledge. It was argued, as one of expediency: prejudiced opposition was smoothed down: hostility conciliated, at an immense sacrifice to the labouring classes.

Besides, the weak, vain, and wicked deferring to the operation of evil, and as one of its consequences, the labouring classes were taught, to look up overmuch for help, and not taught to depend on themselves, for giving effect even to the part for the whole system.

Hence, was produced, distrust between leaders and led. Hence arose that apathy, the invariable consequence of causing reliance to be placed in others doing that, which, if it is to be done, must be done by one's self. And, though something was given, it was given grudgingly; for that was held out as a gift, which was a right.

From the errors in principle, and detail, which have been pointed out, the failure of Mechanics' Institutions was obvious.—The scheme was purely for the people, and if done effectually, it was to be done through their agency solely. In great degree, the efficient power was made passive, when it should have been made most active, failure the result; a popular object was lost, because not made dependent on popularity.

Not made wiser by the failure of schools in the nature of Mechanics' Institutions, the advocates of a part for the whole of knowledge, set about supplying the deficiency, in a somewhat different manner, but on the same principle precisely, and the result was, the formation of the Society for the Diffusion of useful Knowledge.

The principle of the Society was a part for the whole of knowledge; but instead of its members subscribing funds for popular instruction, with a knowledge that the labouring classes had no money to pay for instruction, the egregious blunder was committed, of expecting a poverty-stricken people to maintain the Society, not indeed by a penny subscription, but by buying the tracts the Society should publish;—to be sure, the tracts, as being of small price, were not dear bargains for the intended purchasers, provided only, they could afford to buy, and when bought, could read and understand them.

The Society professed to fill the gap made by the failure of Mechanics' Institutions, but not a step further did they go. Acting on the prohibitive system, of a part for the whole, they immediately published a great many tracts, chiefly on scientific subjects—a sprinkling of biography—some history, a history of Greece preposterously enough, for the English labouring classes ignorant of that of their own country. Their scheme was to supply popular instruction, which some of the members by other means had before undertaken and failed in. The communication of science was their sole aim,—to instruct the labouring classes in morals and politics was no part of their scheme,—and in this was the reservation—a seeming to go onwards, and yet a holding back; in fact, theirs was the part of the wagoner whipping his horses, and slyly fastening the drag on the wagon going up hill.

The Society's tracts have been pronounced, by competent judges, to be faulty, but they are perhaps on the whole well enough. The misfortune was, and still is, the matter is scientific, and treated in a repulsively scientific manner, of course generally unintelligible, if not altogether unpalatable.

Failing in their professed object, the conveying of popular knowledge in a popular way, a failure at the eleventh hour confessed, by an attempt to remedy it when it was too late: failing thus, did not speak much for the appropriate aptitude of the Society for their volunteer task, saying nothing of the shameful reservation of that knowledge, of which there was the great need—moral and political philosophy.

Looking at the object in view, the Society was unhappy in their choice of means every way; true it is, part of the way they travelled the right road; they set out in the right direction; but very soon they mistook the path, and not that only, but they hung out sign-posts no one could read.

It would be strange if the Society had done no good. Some good they did, and in this way,—their cheap tracts caused the publication of cheap books; but books, however cheap, above the means of the many to buy. May be instanced, the interesting journal of Richard and John Lander, in three nice little volumes, at a price something like reasonable, which many may buy; but in the old way of publishing, a big book, and a dear one—a work not to be thought of by the many.

Besides affording an instance of the indirect good done by the Society, the journal of the Landers is of another and deeper application.

For years, the grand geographical question proposed for solution, has been the termination of the Niger. In the attempt to solve it, Park, Denham, Clapperton, and their companions, save one, have perished. They were men of talent and education, lavishly patronised by authority, and favoured by the aristocracy; yet genius, talent, courage, aided by all the means and appliances wealth and power command, all were thrown away—the expeditions failed.

Yet the question has been solved. By whom? By two of the labouring classes, a gentleman's servant and his brother, ignorant of nearly all but the simple rudiments; barely tolerated by government; "yet," says an intelligent writer in the *Examiner*, "patience and perseverance accomplished what science, rank, enterprize, and courage had failed to perform, and their journal is really a superior production."

One incident is well worth notice; when the two brothers had been seized by river pirates, and there was a talk of selling them for slaves, the idea of selling a white man for a slave appeared so monstrous a thing to their black servants and attendants, that they bursted out into loud lamentations, crying, "Black man only slave!" What an appeal this to humanity, to put down the traffic in black human flesh; what a touching instance for us to feel for others, as others feel for us! Think of our black brethren across the Atlantic!

The example of the Landers, if it stood alone, which by hundreds and thousands of instances it does not, but if it did, of itself it would form an unanswerable argument for the instruction of the labouring classes, if for nothing else than turning their energetic intelligence to the best use for others. Instruction alone will not make men wise and happy; it is merely putting them on the right road to wisdom and happiness: it yet has to be shown, that any one class of men have an exclusive right to travel that road. But to return:—

In Mechanics' Institutions, in the Diffusion Society, there is a strong likeness of the machinery of the one to that of the other: the same end proposed; a nearly similar if not an identical mean taken to effect it—prohibition of all kinds except scientific knowledge. Identity so singularly coincident could scarcely be the work of chance. In the known fact that one mind gave impulse to both societies, explanation may be had.

In Mechanics' Institutions, science held out as the only becoming, the only needful, object of study—by whom? By Henry Brougham.

And science, the only object inculcated by the Society, as appears by their first treatise, explaining the nature and tendency of their views; and of those views, science was the beginning, the middle, and the end—and this first treatise written by whom? By Henry Brougham.

Now here is design, or some other thing. If not design—was it idiosyncrasy, a peculiar formation of mind, a monomaniac attraction for one thing, for instance, science before all others, and for them; or was it inability to travel out of a circle: or was it want of comprehensive vigour of mind? Surely none of these. What then

was it? Surely design, at first darkly hinted, but avowed from the outset of that second attempt, that has proved the second failure. It was design, and design worldly and base, insidiously working its own ends, under the wretchedly futile pretence of giving the labouring classes some knowledge, making it all in all, in order the more effectually to withdraw their minds from all contemplation of morals and of politics. What a sight to see, Samson "donning" himself in the garments of Delilah, and with the soft-tongued voice of delusion, preaching "science,—mathematical science,—advantages and pleasures of science!"

A greater than Samson said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." As little can he live by science. And they who would teach science as all the knowledge needful, calling it useful, do but make the mistake they would do, who, professing to teach all things, left out science. The Society for the Diffusion of useful Knowledge adopted science for all knowledge; a child might understand failure would be a thing of course.

Let attention now be turned to the state of general education, bearing on the subject in this way, that without elementary instruction first had, knowledge is a sealed book.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the progress of education has been great in an extraordinary degree; but that progress, however rapid and great, is but comparative; for though, comparatively speaking, few people are unable to read and write, it is to be feared there is still considerable deficiency in the means of even mere elementary instruction.

It appears by the education returns of 1818, in a population of about 12,000,000, there were 24,700 endowed, unendowed, and Sunday schools, at which were *daily* taught 675,000 children, and *once a week* 477,500 children; total taught *daily* and *weekly* 1,152,500. Supposing, as certainly was the fact, many of the *Sunday* were *day* scholars, a deduction is to be made from the sum total, in order to show the number actually receiving education, which may be estimated at about 850,000 or 900,000 fourteen years ago. These returns are very incorrect, and little reliance is to be placed on them; perhaps they may be a distant approximation to the truth. In 1828, that is four years ago, certain returns relating to education were obtained, upon which data it was estimated, that 1,500,000 children of the labouring classes were actually receiving education daily and weekly.

The returns of the year 1828 are, it is admitted, but approximations to the truth. There are other grounds for disputing them.—They were made solely by those who are and have been the notorious enemies of education, and as such had a sinister motive in exaggeration. And he at whose instance those returns were made, was, as they say of snails, drawing in his horns in regard to popularities, and wanted an excuse, for dropping one most obnoxious popularity—the education of the labouring classes; and he the false friend,—I mean the Lord Brougham and Vaux—pretended he had found it in the exaggerated statements of the enemies of education. Pitifully enough he excuses himself by saying, "there exists no large portion" without the means of instruction: on his own admission, there is some portion without. If he have any recollection of the principles on which he started, without selling his birthright for a mess of porridge, he is

pledged to persevere till not one child exists without the means of instruction.

Now these returns are grossly false, or the labouring population of the South are fully educated, which from individual observation of some extent, I know to be false, and from having school-fellows amongst the working clergy, that ill used body the curates of the Established Church, in many parts of the South, I find that their information supports my own observation. That the labouring classes of the South are scarcely educated at all, is, however, a notorious fact which at once falsifies the returns.

The "no large portion" it is to be feared, amounts to one fifth at least of the population, who are without the means of instruction; and seeing that subscription schools are falling away, it may be as near the truth to assume the proportion at one fourth.

To promote the elementary instruction of the labouring classes, two systems, of very different principles, were acted upon.

One system, patronised by the Church of England (an exclusive system itself), may be called the prohibitive, because admitting to its advantages the children of those parents only who adopted the principles and observed the ceremonies of that Church.

Now, if all the population of England were Church-goers, no harm could ensue from the system indicated. But they are not all Church-goers, and the consequence is, that in proportion to the number of persons not Church-goers, popularly called Dissenters, just so many would be shut out. The practical result is this—that supposing in a population of *thirteen* millions (the number of inhabitants assigned to England and Wales, by the population returns of 1831), *five* millions only are church-goers, *eight* millions would go uneducated; that is, whatever in point of fact their numbers may be, the Dissenters would go uneducated. On the assumed proportions, nearly one-third is provided with the means of education, nearly two-thirds left in ignorance. And yet this system of prohibition upon eight in a population of thirteen millions has been called, and grossly mis-called, NATIONAL; the calling of it one amongst innumerable instances of the abuse of names, showing the necessity of narrowly looking into things to see that they are what they are called, for by giving things false names, as by making false pretences, is effected as much, if not more of the mischief done in the world.

It has been shown, that if none but National schools had existed, nearly two-thirds of the English population would have gone uneducated. To counteract the vicious tendency of the prohibitive system, necessarily was to be adopted another, and that the free system.

The principle upon which the free system has been conducted, is, that of the admission of children without distinction, and without restriction, regarding the class of religionists their parents belong to. Of a truth, this seems to be the right system. Here is said—education good for all. And here is education given to all—the door is closed upon none, and it is opened to all who knock. And what is the practical result? This—if the proportion between Church-people and Dissenters were changed; if Dissenters were but one-third of the population, and none but schools on the free system existed—what the effect? That the children of Church people would be excluded? Not so—for schools on the free system, as the name imports, would

be accessible to all children indifferently, their parents contributing towards the expense, for it cannot be expected that Dissenters should educate Church people gratis, any more than Church people educate Dissenters—all that is, all that can be justly required is, that neither should be asked, much less forced, to give to that from the benefit of which he is excluded, by prohibition positive on the one hand, or by conscientious scruples on the other. In the free system is a great principle, not professed but practised as well. The free system is commonly called the British and Foreign—a name ill chosen, because not fully significative of its tendencies. Neither British nor Foreign include Ireland, and yet Ireland is not excluded, for the free system is for all men, nations, and languages.

It would be besides the question, to discuss the merits of either the National, or British and foreign system, in detail, as mere elementary schools at which different modes of teaching may be in use, and both equally good; but whether so or not, is matter of opinion, and not material, as either system in full operation would effect that which is desired by all just and good men—general instruction.

In the prohibitive, falsely called National system, for that would include all, and the greater part by it are excluded, is to be seen and noted the fault already pointed out, as attaching to the original formation of Mechanics' Institutions, and also to that which has been built on their ruins, the Diffusion Society—that fault, a prohibitive system. The National School system would leave uneducated a third of the nation. The Diffusion Society would a half, or a quarter only, teach men. Hence a practical consequence is deduced, that as all children should be taught, so when they grow to man's estate they should have no bounds put upon the acquisition of knowledge, scientific, general, moral, political.

Though all the good that might be done has not been done, a wonderful spread of the means of acquiring knowledge has been made amongst the labouring classes, which has paved the way for learning that which is to be learned in the great school of the world only; and the formation of Mechanics' Institutions is proof that they who formed them deemed the groundwork—its extent they have certainly overrated—to be laid for learning that which is neither taught, nor to be learned at school.

Reading, which is the means of understanding the thoughts of other men; writing, which is the means of making our own thoughts known to others, by certain signs forming words at length, or by figures, as used in arithmetic, which is meant to be included in the word, writing, but for shortness not expressed: reading and writing are but the handmaidens of knowledge, not knowledge itself—that they are deemed so, is a common error. Reading and writing are the means by which knowledge may be attained in a less imperfect degree than without them: and thus, what A, B, C, and pot-hooks and hangers are to reading and writing—reading and writing are to knowledge—the means, not the end. Without reading and writing it is not impossible to acquire knowledge; but it must necessarily be small, contracted, imperfect, from the narrow field from which it is gleaned, not reaped, which is another strong argument, why use of the means reading and writing place within the power of man, should be boundless. In order to acquire knowledge, demands a beginning in the right way,

and therefore the elements are first to be taught and learned;—but if nothing more is thought needful, the mere elements are of little use; indeed, it is as if a man learned the use of the axe, and then laid it carefully away: in such a case the knowledge of the use of the instrument is of no earthly utility.

Whether or no, more than the mere teaching of elements might be taught at popular schools, is a question well meriting attentive consideration and discussion. It is thought that much useful knowledge, in its true sense, might be taught, in addition to the routine course pursued in the best regulated popular schools, by *popular*, meaning schools for the labouring classes.

After they have left school, the children of the labouring classes have seldom an opportunity of getting even scanty information. The merest rudiments of any science are better than none; the veriest outline of the sources of general literary intelligence would be preferable to none; making, however, no prohibition of, and giving no preference to, one branch of science over another. A little arithmetic, and a little of the science of political economy; a little mathematics, and a little of the sciences of morals and of politics, may well go hand in hand with reading and writing—why not? Let be given a sound prohibitive reason,—it has not yet been given,—and it is thought it never can. Pass by unheeded the heartless sneer, the senseless sarcasm of the most sarcastic of living men, so fond to doting of his own “little nostrums,” stone blind to his own “big blunders.” Let be quoted the senseless lines of the senseless poet who penned them, of the danger of a little learning: critics do say himself had been none the worse of a good deal more than he had. The ready answer to those who sing—

“Drink deep or taste not the Pierian spring!”

is, “they despise a little learning, not because of admiration of a great deal, but that they worship ignorance.” Is want of capacity talked of amongst ragged jackets and shoeless feet? Here is the answer—want sharpens wit, prosperity deadens it, all the world through—the poorest scholar, in the poorest school, whatever else of the ills of life he has to suffer and struggle with, has not been cursed with the monopoly of poverty of mind; bear witness in times past, American Benjamin Franklin, printer’s lad, discoverer of electricity, statesman, and founder in part of American independence; Scotch Ferguson, the shepherd mathematician; Scotch Burns, the ploughman and poet; in our own, English Richard and John Lander; John Clare, labourer and poet;—though unnamed, a countless array of names sprung from the labouring classes must present itself to every mind of common intelligence.

To the upper classes, all the roads to all knowledge are open day and night. All that on their account is to be desired is, that a right direction should be taken. Certain it is the great schools, literally schools for the great, and the old universities,—the new ones, the London University and King’s College (it is as well to name them), are but on trial—the great Schools and old Universities are examples of what is to be shunned:—time mispent and lost—mental power wasted and blasted—these the sums of their product.

Private education, at private schools, has regard to the useful, but still admits of vast improvement, though it is admitted, no mean ad-

vances have been made in keeping pace with the wants of these improving times. And thus much of general education.

In whatever station of life man is placed, in order to acquire knowledge, be it much or little, he must go to school twice.

First school:—formerly, the beginning was at the *Dame* school; now people go to school a stage earlier, and begin at the *Infant* school; and so on progressively, till the rudiments have been got. At the first schooling, the rudiments, and the way of using them (sometimes not even that), are all that are learned.

School the second, to which a man must go, if he would be knowing, is that wherein he must be his own teacher. Hitherto he has been gaining, not knowledge, but the means of coming at it. Now he must apply himself—now, if ever, is he to make himself acquainted with the matter of knowledge.

Arrived now to that period of life has man, when station determines, whether, or no, if he desire it, he shall know much or little.—The difficulty, with most men, is the want of means to progress.

To the wealthy, all that is needed presents itself on all sides.

Far different is the lot of those cast in poverty. To them every step is an arduous difficulty. They have no command of means. Without help, then, here is a bar, an insurmountable obstacle, opposed to the progress of the labouring classes.

The want of the labouring classes after having obtained the rudiments, is the means of applying their elemental knowledge; in a word, a school wherein grown-up persons have the means of teaching themselves.

Conducted on right principles, Mechanics' Institutions present the means of progress to the labouring classes independently; for by the union of the individually small resources of many, the materials of knowledge can be had for the use of all—materials which, singly, individuals cannot have, and which, let a man yearn for knowledge as a mother yearneth for her child, alone, shall he never be able to command—for which he may pine and embitter all that to him remains of life: blessed he may have been with a glimpse of the tree of knowledge, but denied the fruit, overcome by that bitterness of spirit which hope expired creates in the human breast,—crushed by the weight of that exceeding misery, he falls *the victim of the selfishness of the few denying knowledge to the many*.

But the right principle of conducting Mechanics' Institutions has been spoken of—what is it said to be? This—the affording to the labouring classes of the means of having all essential knowledge. This answer leads to another, and an obvious question—what is essential knowledge said to be?

Essential knowledge for the labouring classes may be divided into two parts;—*first*, that knowledge, or learning, relating to their trades;—*second*, that knowledge, or learning, relating to their stations in life, as members of society.

In the words before used, and repetition here will have its use—essential knowledge means whatever may be made use of in all the concerns and relations of life—*physically—morally*:—*physically*, regarding knowledge of the means of learning how to live, and having relation to a proper business: *morally*, regarding the knowledge of the ruling men their duty to themselves, and to their neighbours, in conduct in society.

First, of that essential knowledge relating to the means by which a man is to live. Of the knowledge relating to business, it may be practical—theoretical. Oftentimes practice goes before theory with the labouring classes—they learn the result without learning the cause. The mason, the joiner, the shipwright, besides mere dexterity of hand, should have some acquaintance with mathematics, to give them an insight into the reason of the results which they mechanically produce. Of their trades, mathematics form the theory—theory is nothing more than the result of the experiences of many men, put into an arranged, compact system of general rules; whilst practice is but the experience of one individual—and, besides that the individual versed in theory can undertake works, to which practically he may not be able to put a hand's turn—a vast advantage over the mere practical man—as the experience of many must be greater than that of one, it follows, that practice grounded on theory must be better than practice which has for its direction nothing but the rule of thumb, which is guess work.

In like manner, the dyer, and the tanner, (of these trades merely by way of exemplification), ought to know something of chemistry, forming the theory of their respective trades, which are certain practical combinations of vegetable and mineral matters, to produce certain results.

Mathematics bearing on the mason's trade, chemistry on that of the dyer, it is needful these two sciences be made the first objects of study. Of these two sciences, each having gained a competent knowledge,—should each rest satisfied with such his stock of knowledge? By no means. The mason should then try to muster a little chemistry, the dyer a little mathematics; for no man should confine his mind to one object, any more than his body to one position: if he do, the mind like the body becomes contracted. Indeed, first having made himself master of the knowledge relating to his trade, it is the duty of every man to learn whatever else he can—he cannot be the worse by what he knows, but he may be a sufferer by what he does *not* know. Though the bearing of any given science on the trade of the shoemaker may not be very obvious, yet if he who can make a shoe knows something more, the chances are greatly that some time or other in life he is a gainer by it.

Next follows that which is of every day use, as geography, history, natural history, civil history of men and nations—then let follow the study of any knowledge the mind has a turn for. If he have time, a man may take the circle of the sciences—if not for the whole; for as much as he has spare time—and the more he knows, the more readily will he understand what he may be learning, and also have a clearer and stronger comprehension of that which is already known to him; for the mind, like the body, increases its strength by exercise. Undoubtedly, as before said, by the labouring classes first is to be acquired the knowledge relating to their trades: then follows whatever can be learned of what goes by the name of the strict sciences;—for example, as was said by a good and deeply-knowing man, JOHN LOCKE—all men should know something of mathematics, not so much to be mathematicians, as to be able to reason strictly. The first part of essential knowledge may be said to comprise all the sciences.

Whilst, however, a man is acquiring scientific knowledge, both time and opportunity will present themselves for turning the mind to that which is quite as important as science—general literature.

Second, of that essential knowledge regarding the rules by which a man is to regulate his conduct as a member of society. This knowledge comprises morals and politics. Moral duty is contained in that system of rules by which man, as an accountable being, is to regulate those actions, which besides teaching the paying of obedience to those laws—the laws of his country neither prohibit nor enjoin : it is that science which teaches the duty man owes to himself, and to his neighbour, in all the relations of life ; some call it ethics, others moral philosophy.

For self-government must be known, moral philosophy. And as for those who would be mathematicians, it is necessary to know mathematics, (a truism every body knows) ; just as necessary is it for every citizen to know whatever relates to the constitution of the state in which he lives, in order to be a citizen, (a truism equally, but curiously enough one that, with a few exceptions, every body denies), and a good one, as defined by an orator of old, by obeying the laws. Must he not then know those laws, for how else can he obey them ? Simple as the question may seem, it is well to ask it, for some there are who demand obedience to, but deny knowledge of the law to those from whom obedience is required, and if not paid, they are punished. The answer is—yes : and moreover, not only ought the citizen to know the mere letter, but also understand the spirit of the laws, and the history of his country as well, that he may know what as a free man are his rights—a word popularly well understood : what, his duties as a subject towards fellow subjects : what, towards those in whom has been put delegated authority over him : above all, that he may know what are the duties of those placed in authority towards him. In a word, he must be well acquainted with those things well understood by the word *politics* ; and as intimately connected with that same word politics, he must well know the science called political economy, which teaches the best mode of managing the affairs of a nation, as domestic economy does that of a family. The second part of essential knowledge may be comprised in these words—moral and political philosophy.

Those fearful of what they hear, not because it is bad, but new, are referred to a popular treatise on moral and political philosophy, written by a dignitary of the established church, William Paley, whose authority may be admitted to justify—his work proves his conviction of its necessity—any connection insisted on, of moral with political knowledge. Reference to William Paley's book has been made, for the sake of well-meaning but weak people, apt to suffer their sense to be scared away by a phantom of their own raising—the bugbear, innovation.

It will be seen at once, that one all-important part of human knowledge—religion—has not been spoken of ; it has not been, however, through forgetfulness, but design, and design for the reasons following : *first*, a feeling of impropriety in mixing up spiritual matters with affairs purely worldly, and having no immediate reference to religion, further than as all things have connexion with it—a connexion best shown, not by having the word ever in the mouth, but

by that decent and serious conduct, the result and proof of the operation of its doctrines upon the mind: and, *second*, because or the teaching of religion, in any number, are existing fit places and appropriate teachers.

Overwhelmingly great, looking to the situation of the labouring classes, as may seem to be the demands made upon a man's time and understanding, no one thing has been insisted on but that, which it is the duty of one and all, whatever the station, to be acquainted with.

For the reason that men should know the science bearing on their trades, for the same reason they should know the sciences relating to their moral and political duties. True it may be, and is, the labouring classes, from their circumstances, are imperfectly acquainted with the learning relating to their trades, still less knowing of that relating to their moral and political duties: no reason this for keeping them in ignorance, but the contrary, and a spur to afford the means of improvement.

On all sides it seems nearly agreed, something should be made known to the labouring classes. Some confine that something to mere reading and writing: others go a step farther, and define that something to be useful knowledge, in the shape of science, and nothing else. It is asked, can any reason be given, why all that can be known should not?

Nearly universal assent grants the necessity of imparting the first essential part of knowledge:—nearly universal dissent, with exceptions few but daily increasing, denies the propriety, much more the necessity, of imparting the second kind of essential knowledge—moral and political philosophy.

Whence springs this horribly strange, inconsistent, and monstrous opinion in those already informed? Plainly in the fears begotten of self interest, lest the mass of mankind having been made knowing of the right, should no longer suffer infliction of the wrong, by which the better and worse informed, all who are informed, as yet few in number, hitherto have contrived to profit at the cost of the rest—the ignorant.

It can scarcely admit of doubt, that the informed few object to information being as equally imparted, as the nature of things admits of; not because knowledge, in its most extended meaning, is or can be bad in itself, or bad more for one than another, and no man can have exclusive right to it, be it ever so good as it is, but because they fear they may lose the advantages always arising from greater knowledge, when few are knowing, and multitudes ignorant: and this position is proved by the fact, that when the few fancy they see their advantage in it, they are ready to instruct in that knowledge, in the imparting of which they conceive their advantage to lie.

Where is to be found the man who thinks the mason or the dyer the worse for knowing the sciences bearing on their trades, or all masons or dyers knowing them? Because such knowledge may profit himself as an employer, he does not object to such labourers being taught such knowledge.

Possibly it may be, and likely it is otherwise amongst the masons and dyers. Perhaps the well instructed mason or dyer objects to the rest of their trades being as knowing as themselves. Perhaps they do

so. If they do, is any one willing to acknowledge himself so stupidly, blindly ignorant, as to confess he cannot, and does not see the motive, and that that motive is selfishness? That no one has a right to any thing hurtful to the rest, is a thing, in the case of masons readily perceived and admitted to be wrong. For any one to assert there should be but one, or a few, skilful masons, the absurdity, as regards those having need of masons, the injustice, as regards the whole body of masons, are they not evident on the bare statement of the question?

For the trade of masons, substitute the rights and duties of citizenship; it is undeniable, that as of the knowledge bearing on all trades, so of that knowledge relating to moral and political duties and rights, one or a few knowing more than the rest, is and can be no reason for keeping the rest in ignorance. The absurdity and injustice of the one or few skilful masons, not greater than that of few well informed citizens. In the latter respect, in truth, it is the depth of absurdity, the greatest injustice, because all men cannot be masons, and it is certain they must all be citizens, proving, if there be any such thing as proof, the right of all to know what are the rights and duties of citizenship.

It comes to this, that as by denying instruction to the mason, he is rendered an ignorant blunderer, so by denying knowledge of his rights and duties, the citizen is made a slave. Ignorance of social rights and duties incapacitates for joining, directly or indirectly, in framing social rules, as effectually as ignorance of physic incapacitates a man for prescribing for himself in sickness. If ignorance of social rights and duties be enforced, no matter how, the result is slavery; for to the member or members of the state, thus enforced; participation, because of the absence of fitting qualifications, is denied in framing the rules to regulate his or their conduct—and this, past contradiction, is slavery; more or less qualified by chance, it may be, but still slavery; for the rule of authority is enforced and obeyed, without having consented to it.

Generally speaking, denial of the knowledge relating to social rights and duties, is only, in other words, propounding slavery.

Another consequence of the denial spoken of, is a more particular but equally conclusive application as the general one, and it is this, that if ignorance of political knowledge induces slavery—the advocates of a part for the whole of knowledge, in insisting on scientific to the exclusive denial of moral and political knowledge, do in fact advocate partial ignorance as regards knowledge and regarding citizenship—total slavery.

Perhaps, logically, this argument should not now be introduced; but as what follows mainly depends on the principle of universal right to universal knowledge, I deem it best first to lay the foundation of that principle in the surest way I can.

What essential knowledge is, has been shown. It now properly enough may be inquired—what are the means within the compass of the labouring classes to acquire essential knowledge?

Elementary instruction, it has been already shown, is still deficient. As to the means of acquiring the knowledge not taught at school, with even the advantages now at command, they amount to little more than this, that by possibility many may, whilst very many more can not command them.

In viewing the means of elementary and subsequent instruction, a distinction is to be made between the labouring classes living in towns, commonly called mechanics, and the labouring classes living in the country, and called commonly agricultural labourers; the former, in Mechanics' Institutions are in some small measure provided; but if the latter know reading and writing, very likely it is all they may know, for of the means of further improvement they are destitute; and unless something is done for them, from the nature of their situation, distance from each other preventing co-operation, they must continue destitute: and in the means of elementary instruction they are badly off.

Some time ago, Henry Brougham attempted to introduce a system for giving elementary instruction to both town and country population, by establishing, at the public expense, parish schools wherever there might be a want of them; but unfortunately, like most of his ameliorating schemes, this one failed.

For teaching the rudiments to persons too poor to pay even a trifle for it, the parish school system was good; but in many other respects it was faulty, like all the plans of its proposer, in not having been made efficient to do all the good which might have been effected. Unhappily, however, for the country population, especially that of the South, whose state of ignorance is destitution, mentally and bodily, is equally alarming and distressing, the plan, as before said, failed.

On the supposition that elementary instruction has been sufficiently provided, and a greater error could scarcely have been made as respects the country population living in the South, an advance has been talked of by providing the country population with the means of further improvement, by the formation of parish libraries at the expense of the parish.

The parish library scheme is understood to be one of the Lord Brougham and Vaux. From the nature of the plan, so far as it has been indicated, it would appear that the faults in the system of Mechanics' Institutions are to be transplanted into the parish library: if so, failure follows of course.

It appears the readers of the parish library, the parish population, are to have no part in the management, none in the selection of the books: hence they will take no interest in the thing, and either not read at all, or have given to read books unsuitable, because above their understandings, or not agreeable to their tastes.

It is certain if a man is to be invited to improve his mind, the inviter must neither overlook his circumstances, nor go beyond his powers; still less neglect to consult his taste. All these things are to be considered, or the invitation will be of no use. In fact, if you would really confer a benefit, just leave him to act as you would yourself. Advise him? Certainly—but not to the forcing of advice upon him. If he has sense, he will soon see if the advice be worth listening to. Coming from a friend, and not a master, the chances are it will be taken. If not, and you happen to be right, the man gains something—he learns a lesson from the best of teachers—experience. Suffer him not to think and act for himself; make his free agency less or more passive, and inevitably are created the seeds of aversion, shortly and certainly producing total disgust.

Is this not so? Ask yourselves, you who are better off in the world. There are those better off than you, who think they have a right to think and act for you. Suppose such an one, in the vile spirit of mischievous meddling with what is best let alone, should lay an embargo on your Milton and Burns, your Franklin, your Adam Smith, your Gibbon, your Hume, and substitute what he deemed proper—what would be your feelings? Those of the labouring man to a certainty. Therefore as you would that others should do to you, do you so to them. The “leave us alone” system has rarely failed. Why has it been so rarely tried? Let selfishness answer.

On the system indicated parish libraries, useless to the parish paying for them, useless to the parish population, who will not read; but not altogether useless—for useful will they be to those who have gotten charters for writing treatises on arts, sciences, letters: charters to give the impress of authority to the prohibition of all but scientific knowledge: charters that are waste papers if the people buy, and equally so if they do not; for no charter can create popular support, and that support given, renders the charter waste paper!

If the people are excluded from an active share in the management of that which most concerns themselves, the best-intentioned plan must fail. Giving a certain sum to be spent in books, and advice along with it, seeing that it is properly applied if need be; why not let the reading labouring men choose such books as they may agree upon among themselves?

It is thought not likely, but certain, that they also who are able to use are able to choose the parish library: if they are not fit, the chances are against their using it after the first burst of novelty. What probability there would have been of the formation of the travelling library before mentioned, under the eye of the parish excise-man, needs little calculation.

The management of parish libraries, it would seem, is to be vested in the parish authorities, and that of itself would lead to the prohibition of moral and political knowledge, just as effectually as if there were an express law for it. In a word, the parish library scheme is parcel of the system of expediency, not of right: it partakes hugely of the nature of half measures, which never do, and never did good; for they defeat themselves in doing half the good aimed at; and by distracting attention, conciliating the weak, propitiating the knavish, and so creating division, all the good that might be done is indefinitely retarded. Half measures are that kind of reform which does away the more unsightly parts of abuse, without tearing them up by the roots, and thus leaving the germs of future mischief to sprout up in rank and pestilent luxuriance—in due season, when pretended reform has lulled suspicion asleep.

As they are unable to do it of themselves, the means should be provided of improving the labouring classes in all kinds of knowledge. Let there be Mechanics’ Institutions in towns. And let there be in parishes Agricultural Institutions—the very word *parish* is enough to drive the labouring man away. First, however, provide elementary instruction, wheresoever and by whomsoever wanted.

And how is this proposed scheme to be done—by imposition of new or application of already existing taxes? Nothing of the kind; for that would be doing indirectly and by force, that which cannot

be done directly and voluntarily because of poverty, which such a plan would not lessen, but aggravate. Such means, however, exist, and intended for the very purpose too.

The income arising from charities has been calculated to amount to near two millions a year; the calculation rests upon the authority of the Lord Brougham and Vaux. A great part of this income arises from charities founded for the purposes of education,—in numerous instances from abuse useless, and from not being suited to the wants of modern times, many more are of very little use. Here, then, are means at hand, obtained neither at the expense of the upper classes, nor yet by burdening the lower; and all that is asked, is, to apply charitable property, to all intents the property of the poor, to the use of the poor, doing thereby justice to them and good to all. From these sources, supplying the means of elementary instruction to the child of every poor man, besides affording to the parent, in the shape of Mechanics' and Agricultural Institutions, the knowledge he has as much need of, and equal right to, as the richest in the land. By this mode of application would be put in course of cultivation that immense tract of land now lying fallow, or if cultivated, cultivated for those who have, and can have not the shadow of a pretext of title to the land, none to its fruits—the rich. Something of the kind applied to the parish school system was talked of, but which something, like other good intentions, much vaunted, indeed, but never perfected, has gone to adorn—as the Spanish proverb has it—the pavement of that place, with the name of which a polite preacher never shocks the ears of a fashionable congregation.

Until something be done, and in the mean time are the people to rest on their oars till the tide of flood sets? Nothing of the kind. They are to bestir themselves, and turn their scanty means to the best advantage. Whatever they do, little though it be, it is so much gained in advance.

To say truth, whatever is done must be done by the labouring classes themselves. To the giving of efficiency to whatever they do, they must depend on themselves, and so escape the trammels of those jealous of the progress of information amongst them; and the jealous and the wealthy are by much too ready and willing to set bounds to its advance, holding up as they do the tracts of the Diffusion Society, and crying out—"Behold the sciences! thus far shall ye go, and no further." This feeling demands another principle of conduct on the part of the labouring classes—and here it is.

Whatever educational system, school, or institution it may be thought proper to adopt and form, let this be the moving principle—**HELP YOURSELVES, AND HEAVEN WILL HELP YOU.**

Needs this plain and simple principle enforcing? Learn its application from the French people. Had they not helped themselves, when would they have gotten rid of a despotism they ground to dust in three days, as glorious as the sun ever shone on?

Shall this praise stand? It has been said the hatred of the French people is not against the tyranny, but the person of the tyrant. Such a judgment is hastily, if not inconsiderately formed. Recollect that at this time the capital of France is placed under military law: military law is arbitrary power under another name; in its eye suspicion is equivalent to condemnation: it is the law of lawless

power, its caprice is its rule: under it the press is silenced; and under it no man can speak his mind without a musket and bayonet pointed at his breast. Great allowances are therefore to be made. But of the example of the French people, merely by way of showing the necessity of self-reliance.

If aught is to be done, the people must think and act for themselves: their trust must be in themselves: by themselves: for themselves: and there is no difficulty their united energy cannot overcome, as the events of the past month in this country hath abundantly convinced the world.

Somewhat now of the detail pertaining to Mechanics' Institutions.

In the library of a Mechanic's Institution, it must be borne in mind how many workmen of different trades are to be supplied with scientific works bearing on their respective trades. There must be mathematics, and the particular branches of it, applicable to the trades of sailors, shipwrights, watchmakers, working mechanics, millwrights, masons, and perspective for painters: botany for gardeners; chemistry for dyers, tanners, soapmakers, bleachers, brewers; anatomy for painters; comparative anatomy for farriers and blacksmiths; mineralogy for miners; the whole circle of the sciences might be mentioned, and none be out of place as applicable to trades and manufactures.

For the use of those to whom science is not essential, for shoemakers, weavers, tailors, for men of all trades, there is to be laid in a large and various stock for common use; as history, sacred, ecclesiastical, civil, ancient and modern, and natural history, biography, voyages, travels; say general literature, extending admission to poetry (exclude poetry, and Burns the ploughman, the first, if not so amongst the first of poets!); excluding not even novels, selecting, however, the standard novels, adding Walter Scott's and Maria Edgeworth's, and one or two others—works conveying a vast fund of information useful to all, and which thousands never think of seeking for in any other shape.

Let no man startle at the proposed extent of the library. By little and little much may be done, and in time, by degrees, all be accomplished. However, as a main part of the universal system, let not an enlarged and liberal selection according to means ever be lost sight of, because to great numbers of working men, the strict sciences are of no use, and to them general literature is every thing: and besides, it is no less important to those studying science, for it is a palpable truth that mathematics teach a man nothing but mathematics.

As there are many minds to be instructed, so there ought to be as much diversity as possible in the funds of instruction—books. And if a system of general selection be not adopted, whichever class of readers is gratified by exclusive attention to their wants, whether the scientific at the expense of the general readers, that which by common understanding was meant for common use, is turned into a monopoly; a few are satisfied, the rest naturally dissatisfied—hence heartburnings, quarrels, disunion, and a breaking up of the society.

But the library of a Mechanic's Institution is miserably deficient—is altogether incomplete—unless it contains works on moral and political philosophy, which from its vast importance requires an extended notice.

The science of metaphysics, treating on the formation of ideas; having existence in the mind only, and having form and meaning given to them by words, this science is necessary to the understanding of works treating on morals, on laws, and on the nature of government. As helps to a right understanding of such works, may be instanced John Locke's *Essay on the Mind*, and his smaller treatise on the conduct of the understanding, which is the germ of Isaac Watts' more enlarged treatise on the improvement of the mind, not omitting David Hume's essays, of which it is wished an edition were published, leaving out the essays strictly treating on theological subjects, so as to leave the weak-minded, stirred up by hypocrites, no ground of cavil. And the same may be said of the political works of Thomas Paine, which are as clever as his theological are vile, base, and silly.

The science of political economy, pointing out how good government may be most cheaply effected, by showing the best modes of applying the resources of nations to the conduct of national affairs, so as to produce the greatest aggregate of individual happiness, no *Mechanic's Institution* should be without "*The Wealth of Nations*," that work above price of the "prince of political economists," Adam Smith. For those who dare not encounter Smith at first, there are excellent little books, and cheap withal, now in course of publication, by one of the ornaments of her sex, Harriet Martineau.

Works on morals and laws, and on the nature of government, are difficult of selection;—first, because the two latter have been mostly written on false principles;—and second, because those principles have been treated in a way any thing but suited to popular apprehension. An exception is Adam Smith's theory of moral sentiments; and William Paley's work on moral and political philosophy, as making a large stride towards right may be admitted.

Law, until reformed, must be taken as it is, and so must its commentator, Judge William Blackstone, whose commentaries may stand side by side, but only side by side, with Jeremy Bentham's *Fragments on Government*, or a comment on the commentaries (his first work), and his *Book of Fallacies*: with this hint, it is adviseable to read the comment first, not forgetting the fallacies, in order to be on the guard against the gross errors in the principles of government contained in the commentaries of the courtly judge, whose method, and beautifully pure English style have created for him a popularity, of which, on true grounds, he is entirely undeserving. On practical law, may be added, the work popularly called *Burn's Justice*: laugh that laugh may at the idea; let them laugh: it is a book the unpaid magistracy of England, judging from their practice, have read only to misunderstand: let the horney-handed labouring classes of England read it to set them right!

On the making of laws in general, a science called jurisprudence, on a knowledge of the right principles of which so much of human happiness depends, in the works of an illustrious countryman already named—JEREMY BENTHAM—the labouring classes regarding true principles, have all that can be desired, with but one drawback—a not faultless style.

The memory of BENTHAM demands its tribute: thus it is paid: how best to promote the happiness of mankind was the study of his

life, a labour of love: living, to the promotion of human wellbeing his every energy was devoted. Dying, what an affecting example hath he set in causing his body to be dissected, to overcome the prejudice of the living against dissection of the dead:—prejudice, which the example of this good man will go far to eradicate: prejudice which we owe it as a duty to ourselves, to our fellow men—as the deepest and tenderest mark of affection towards those most dear to us—to conquer. Looking at Bentham's works, is to be seen pervading the whole—that brightest emanation of divine being—benevolence—good will towards mankind. Human happiness he made the end of human pursuit; that principle actuated his every word, thought, and action; whatever conduced to its attainment he adopted; whatever opposed that attainment he rejected. As a man, his powers of mind have been rarely if ever equalled; but of this posterity are the judges, and the proof will be, in their acknowledgment that his name has been so bound up as to become identified with his own ever-enduring principle—the greatest happiness. By those who knew him, it is felt that no man, with better chances of success, ever sought at the hands of posterity a verdict of immortality. It is past doubt, for the very enunciation begets acceptance, that when the principles struck out by this good and great moral and political philosopher shall become known and understood, they will govern the world: daily and hourly the period approaches; yea, already, with a voice of thunder, the people of this land have proclaimed—**THE GREATEST HAPPINESS OF THE GREATEST NUMBER.**

In the formation of the Mechanics' Library, the principle contended for and inculcated, is that of universality of knowledge for the labouring classes, putting special weight on works on moral and political knowledge.

On the principle of universality of knowledge will be presented to the labouring classes the means of gaining the knowledge relating to their callings, and that relating to their rights and duties as citizens, besides having a large fund of innocent and instructive enjoyment at command when worn out by daily toil; and why when the body is wearied by labour should not the labourer exercise the mind for relaxation just as the literary man, fatigued by study, relaxes his mind by bodily exercise? Progress rests with individuals; that is, the use they make of their means.

The utmost latitude of admission to elementary instruction and of the means of progress have been urged: follows of course freedom of discussion: how can these be made most useful?

The formation of News Rooms for the labouring classes vividly, and at once, strikes the mind—a feasible plan, and thus it may be done on a small scale. Seventy men by subscribing six shillings yearly, by quarterly payments of eighteen-pence, will be able to raise a fund of twenty pounds, or thereabouts; for this sum, paying for the use of a room, coals, candles, and attendance, they might have one daily and one weekly London paper, the *Athenæum* a London journal of literature, and one or two provincial papers. With increased funds more might be done: one hundred and thirty four men, paying eighteen pence a-piece every three months, might have three daily London papers, besides a quarterly review, not the review so called, but the *Westminster Review*, which is the people's review. As subscriptions in-

creased, more still might be done. It would not be a bad thing to take a paper on the second day from a publican, as many people do, and thus two or three papers might be had for the price of one coming direct.

A word as to the choice of newspapers. It seems desirable that one morning paper should be had, because containing at length the debates in Parliament, which all should see and read, to judge of the ability, honesty, and conduct of public men. Preference should be given to the ablest and honestest. Though none the better for its attempts at thick and thin *Whig* partizanship, the *Morning Chronicle* first offers itself under the able and enlightened editorship of JOHN BLACK: its parliamentary, and other reports, are marked by precision and fairness: and it is least obnoxious to the charge of being conducted in a spirit of trading—not telling but selling the truth to the highest bidders, they who will buy. The *True Sun*, a new evening paper, as an able and unflinching advocate of truth and justice, takes the lead even of the *Morning Chronicle*, and richly merits popular support—the editor's name is *John Bell*. The *Times* is a paper of great but misapplied talent. This is the truth. It has three editors, whose names are said to be *Frazer*, *Stirling*, and *Barnes*, the latter a school-fellow of that indomitable reformer, the kindly-hearted LEIGH HUNT, whose misfortunes in these days of hope and success, reformers should ever bear in mind. But the *Times* has not been, and is not the paper of truth. It is at the beck of the greatest number of buyers, whom it flatters and cringes to; and, like all flatterers, it makes itself amends for its prostration, by bullying and abusing those it may safely bully and abuse with impunity—the non-buyers. So soon as the labouring classes, by union—co-operation—combination—become the greatest purchasers—being the most numerous body, they easily may—they will then command its tone, respect, and services—not else.

An old friend, the cleverest political writer of the age, is not to be forgotten—WILLIAM COBBETT. In his writings, perhaps, a great deal may be condemned, but there is much more meriting the highest praise. The man who wrote on *Cottage Economy*; *Straw Plat*, and introduced it; *Paper against Gold*; *A Year's Residence in America*; and particularly a *French* and an *English* grammar, both the simplest in method, clearest in style, and easiest to be understood, of any ever written—the author of such works as these can scarcely be too highly appreciated by his countrymen, one of whom cheerfully acknowledges his obligations. But may be said, friend COBBETT, if in nothing else, thou art aristocratic in the price of thy *POLITICAL REGISTER*; not that its high price is more than it is worth, but because we, who are poor men, cannot afford to buy.

The *EXAMINER* is essentially the paper of the people. It conceals, it tells nothing for the sake of sale. Corruption it exposes always, sparing no man, no class of men. It serves up none of the garbage of the press—accounts of fights, and other brutalities, as distorted police reports, and scandal of nobility and mobility. It is a paper of principles and opinions, wrought out with a power, an ability, and above all, an honesty which every man may understand, and which no man can possibly mistake. The editor is ALBANY FONBLANQUE. To the truth of this character of the *Examiner*, BLACKWOOD'S *MAGAZINE*, under PROFESSOR WILSON—*FRAZER'S MAGAZINE*; and the *STANDARD NEWS*.

paper, under DOCTOR MAGINN, clever advocates of the *fiercest* anti-popular feelings and principles, bear ample testimony. Every twelve labouring men by subscribing a-piece three shillings a year, may have amongst them the reading of this paper, and no news-room of the labouring classes should be without it.

When the funds admit, holding fast those papers noted for principle and ability, a general selection should be made, to see what is said on all sides, for in the conflict of opinions truth is hit out.

The tax on newspapers falls heaviest on the labouring classes; respecting them, as regards the mind, it is in effect the same as a tax on the necessities of life, as regards the body, ignorance and starvation. No ignorance: no starvation: therefore no substitution of other taxes, but get rid of both taxes as soon as possible.

The advantages of a news-room to the labouring classes are avoidance of the ale house: affording means to judge for themselves of public men and transactions; and bringing into use the moral and political philosophy of the library in forming such judgments.

In the way spoken of has been shown what may be done. Let every man club his mite, and it is done.

Another use springing from Mechanics' Institutions, is their ready adaptation to the formation of societies, for want of a better name, call them "*Societies for the discussion of moral and political philosophy*," that the labouring classes, having the materials of knowledge, may be able to use them in giving proper and intelligible verbal expression to their sentiments.

Admitted the right and propriety of men meeting to improve themselves in the first part of essential knowledge, what earthly objection can there be to their meeting to improve their morals and politics? Why meet to solve a question of arithmetic, and not one of political economy; of moral duty; of political opinions; of good and bad government?

It may be said on these subjects, the labouring classes are ignorant. It is answered just so, and to get rid of that ignorance let them meet. Because of ignorance of arithmetic, they meet, or they continue in ignorance. In meeting to learn arithmetic, in time, some at first, all in time, may arrive at knowledge of it. Trying to learn, they may succeed: never trying, success is impossible. As to the applicability of this reasoning, excepting that arithmetic is not political economy, how stands it? As applicable to the one as to the other, or to neither.

The object aimed at by the formation of Mechanics' and Agricultural Institutions, News Rooms, and Discussion Societies, is—the instruction of the ignorant of the labouring classes who desire to know, and who have not the means of knowing general—scientific—moral—and political knowledge.

At the bare mention of politics, starts up an objector with—"How! The labouring classes! Surely it is not meant to give them political information? Dubious it is, if should be given elementary instruction: extremely doubtful it is, if scientific knowledge, should be given: of political knowledge the denial is universal: nay so many respectable persons think if even reading and writing, (give the impulse, who or what is to stop it?) were let alone, it would be none the worse: really the rest is not to be thought of."

In the statement of the objection is seen, in undisguise, the system of the advocates of the partial and general ignorance of the many, that the few may profit by it. The answer to it consists in giving the system its right name, which shatters it to atoms. Here it is:—Behold the dog in the manger system!

Sifted as it may have been by others, sifted as it has been in every possible way, and of the denial of knowledge in part, or in whole, the conclusion come to is this; for himself each man sees and feels the necessity, the uses, the advantages of knowledge: and he cannot but see equal necessity, use, and advantage to all men, unless he be blinded by passion the most powerful that actuates human beings—selfishness. Knowledge good for one good for all, this, if he have reasonable perception—in his inmost soul man can no more deny than his existence. The instant knowledge has been acquired, its infinite advantage is so strongly felt, selfishness forthwith suggests and urges the denial of it to all others. This is true of men in all ranks of life. And they who are just raised above the labouring classes, make a gross mistake, if they suppose the classes above them do not look on their intelligence with an eye as jealous as their own on those below them: certain it is, if it were in the power of the upper classes, exclusion would be made the rule, until knowledge centered in the few; and of those few there would be found one eager to combat, until he had put down all knowledge under his feet—that its advantages might be all his own; and of such a tyrant Napoleon Bonaparte was no unapt prototype

Asked it is, why should not every man have political knowledge? Do not the operations of government affect the labourer and the non-labourer in equal degree? Surely: for whether a man has much or little, he has equal interest in the making of good laws, not because of much or little, but because of the right to full and peaceable enjoyment of whatever he has, and therefore the making of good laws is an equal concern, and the equal right of rich and poor alike. Good laws are the essence of good government. And in doing that which conduces to good government, which is most likely to effect it—ignorance or knowledge of the means? Dare any man, out of St. Luke's without a keeper, be bold enough to prove his fitness for himself of such an habitation and attendance, as to cry ignorance, partial or total?

But ignorance is cried. Well—how then? Tell the man travelling an unknown road his ignorance is his safest and surest guide. How does it sound? Absurdly enough. Yet they who say this are not more foolish and unreasonable, than they are who, directly or indirectly, denying political information to the labouring classes, have the conscience to make the monstrous demand, that the people shall be obedient good subjects without suffering them to know how!

Pass on now to the sneerers asking—what! are all men then to be prime ministers?

Not so: and here is the the reasonable why not so. As all men should know something of mathematics, not to be mathematicians, but to be able to reason strictly, so should they have political information, not to be governors, but to know the duties of governors and of governed, and so be good subjects.

Prime ministers indeed! But why not, should fortune favour,

as for long she has favoured, without consideration of moral or physical aptitude, so many sprung from the labouring classes? Such ambitious end is not the end proposed by the advocates of the diffusion of political knowledge. Simply their end is, to enable men by political knowledge, not to become prime ministers, but to judge rightly of the checks necessary to keep prime ministers in order. True it is, some one must be prime minister :—what matters it who it is if he have appropriate aptitude, and whether that is more likely to be met with amongst few than many needs no arguing.

Besides, protection of his own is as much a man's duty as respecting the rights of others. Ignorant of his own, how shall he know and respect the rights of others? If the intention is not to transgress, how can he help it who knows not the boundary of his neighbour's land? In this common case, ignorance palpably destroys the good intention, and works the mischief the worst intention could do. Regarding ignorance or knowledge of politics the inference is plain.

One groundless fear of the result of knowledge is, that it will make the labouring classes dissatisfied with their station,

It is not asked are they satisfied now, ignorant as they are presumed to be; but can they be more dissatisfied than they are? And has it never occurred to the dreaders of knowledge, whether or no ignorance or knowledge of the causes, and of the right means of removing dissatisfaction, is the more likely to prevent the apprehended mischief?

By the rule applied to the labouring classes, what yearly shoals of Newtons should not Cambridge produce! Not Newtons, but such as they are, does what they know set them upon having so many masterships of the mint? Any such idea, any such motive actuating university men, even the knowledge alarmists scout. They know well, and admit if all were Newtons, the distinction of being one would cease, and men go on as before. If, as often remarked, the labouring classes were equally informed, is it not clear the being knowing would cease to be a distinction, and all being on a level, things go on just as before? Besides, has it never struck the knowledge-causing-dissatisfaction arguers, that if their very good allies the Diffusion Society, could of the labouring classes make every man a perfect mathematician, what would be the simple consequence? That that sort of knowledge, without other means, is certainly bounded by the want of those means. Regarding scientific, and regarding political knowledge, the result would not be greatly different.

A word now of discussion. Discussion should be as limitless as are the subjects of discussion: this latitude most men assume for themselves, but deny to others—error the plea, forgetting that the individual setting up himself as the standard of right, is as liable to error as any number of individuals doing the same thing.

Is it not clear that error entertained by one, few, or many, and incidental to discussion as to all things human, must be corrected by reason and truth elicited by discussion? If not, it is possible truth may rule, but so may error; but which, chance alone directs. The human mind, naturally bended on inquiry, whether for good or evil, is open to receive every argument offered, of the goodness or badness of which, in contempt of question, reason in the last resort decides. To reason, it is true, all minds are not equally pervious; but accord-

ing to the degree of ability to perceive and receive reasons, decisions are formed.

In matters of law, of government, of religion, it is not this or that opinion that can injure one man, because the directly reverse opinion is held by another. The truth is, if one assume the right of controlling the opinions of another, the right, if any right there be at all, must be open to both; because if the opinion of one individual be hurtful to one other individual of another opinion, it is self-evident the hurtfulness of difference of opinion is reciprocal. Hence, then, if of difference of opinion the result be injury, that injury is reciprocal, and if there be such a thing as justice, inevitably so must the defence against it be reciprocal, which induces clearly and fairly, past contradiction,—freedom of thought, freedom of discussion.

It matters not whether one, few, or many exercise the unjust power, (such it has been proved), of suppressing opinion. On principle, any such power possessed by one, few, or many, is equally indefensible: for whether exercised by a despot over slaves—by aristocratic classes over all beneath them, as it is in this country—or, as it is no where, (least of all is it my aim that so it should be), by the labouring classes over those above them—the exercise of any such power is tyranny, and being tyranny, cannot be the rule of right.

Either the labouring classes have rights and duties to protect, and perform, or they have not. If they have not, then are they slaves. If they have rights and duties, then have they right, and it is their duty to know them.

Friends of partial, enemies of all knowledge, think you, if knowledge is dreaded—is ignorance to be less dreaded? Truly, in one direction are the interests of all men. If selfishness do not break in, all goes well. If selfishness do break in, the frame of society is broken to pieces;—what are the chances? That in remedying the mischief, ignorance (selfishness its parent) will not take the right course, but treat, just as unjust, truth as untruth, to the confusion of right and wrong—the evil which, to speak practically, political corruption has wrought. Is it likely, that men in ridding themselves of intolerable evil, would re-create it in another shape if they knew how to avoid it? Should not the public spoiler—the advocate of partial ignorance—should not each bethink himself that his cherished ignorance will, on the one hand, as little respect what is just as what is unjust, and on the other, as little listen to truth as to untruth? Knowledge of justice would teach respect for justice; abolish injustice it might and it ought: ignorance would confound all things, and its power is boundless if the multitude be ignorant; and never man spoke truth if William Paley did not, when he said that “the physical strength resides in the governed,” at once a plea and a motive for giving right direction to the minds of the many, by affording the means of acquiring “knowledge which is power”—knowledge that disarms physical strength of its terrors, its supposed tendencies to mischief, by giving to it right direction.

Brother members and friends! Freely canvass what I have addressed to you—as freely as I have spoken; if reasonably, adopt it; if otherwise, eschew it. In seeking redress of wrong, it would be paltering to let it be supposed that is not our object; let me impress on your minds the lesson taught by our brethren of *Birmingham*—

PEACE. But what, say you, is wrong to be submitted to, if right be denied? Freemen, asking that question of a freeman, can have but one answer—NO. What then? From our injured brethren of *Ireland* learn, I say, the invincible virtue of PASSIVE RESISTANCE. With thanks for the patient attention with which I have been heard; and, in asking that, with like patient attention, what I have said may be read, I conclude.

THE END.

NOTE.—It may be necessary, after what has been said of the Lord Brougham and Vaux, to add a few words in explanation. Of his surpassing ability as a man, of his personal qualities in private intercourse, I have now, as I always had, unfeigned admiration and sincere esteem. Up to a certain period in politics, his Lordship had no warmer supporter, certainly none more disinterested than myself. Had I known then, as I know now, from Dumont's *Recollections of Mirabeau*, that his Lordship, from the beginning, was a cherished and fostered protégée of the aristocracy, most probably I should have been more guarded. As it was, I looked upon him as the honest maintainer of a popular principle; when he departed from that principle I departed from him, and in doing so my consistency regarding what I have said formerly of Henry Brougham, and what I have now said of the Lord Brougham and Vaux, remains unimpeached. Personal disrespect I am incapable of offering, but when principle demands it, no earthly consideration shall restrain me from speaking what I think.

7 Dec. 1862



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